



**North Central Conservancy Trust**  
**Vol. 15 No. 1** **Spring 2016**

# THE TIES THAT BIND US



*Plover River*

*Photo by Roger Zimmermann*

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## TITLE

*Aaron Thompson, President*

## MOVING FORWARD

*Sharon Schwab, Interim Executive Director*

It has been an honor to serve as your part-time Interim Executive Director for the past six months. During this time I have learned both the challenge and the joy of this important position...

It is a challenge to wear so many hats. I'm not sure how our former Executive Director Betsy Kerlin did it so well! In this role one has to be: office manager and front-line staff—managing emails, calls, conferences and piles of paperwork; financial officer—managing invoices, checkbook, income/disbursements; outreach and education coordinator—giving presentations, sending out materials, updating social media; stewardship director—overseeing landowner contacts, baseline documents and conservation easements; legal assistant—scrutinizing the minutiae of important documents and conferring with legal counsel; and counselor—comforting and reassuring landowners who want to protect their land but don't know when, how, have no financial resources, or can't get along with family members to share similar goals for protection.

Our natural resources are precious and protecting them in perpetuity is the mission of this organization. The joy of this job is when that actually happens. This spring two wonderful things did. First, the signing of the StarPoint Conservation Easement (CE) and the accompanying baseline document. The latter was prepared by Betsy and former Properties Committee member Dr. David Hillier. The final version of the CE was hammered out by the Properties Committee and then the Board of Directors. To do so however required deciphering the meaning of words like “remodel” and “residential” so that we were all clear, in perpetuity, what they really mean. Congratulations to all involved in these important documents, and to members of the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society, who will hold the CE until the property is sold.

In early May, a Gift Agreement was signed between the Mildred E. Bagley Trust and NCCT. This beautiful Adams County property will be conveyed to us following a final CE and pending baseline document. The land melds a mix of primarily old oak forest with high-quality cropland, plus a two-acre building zone. Our appreciation is expressed to the Bagley family and their counsel who have been a joy to work with.

I've thoroughly enjoyed my short stint here as Interim Executive Director, but am happy to toss the baton to my colleague, peer, and friend Janet Smith. I wish her the best. It was important for me to understand the challenges and experience the joy. Time to move forward!

With deepest appreciation, Sharon

## PLOVER RIVER

Encompassing over 200 miles and four counties, the Plover River watershed is home to many landowners and wildlife habitats. It is classified as a Class 1 trout stream from the headwaters in Langlade south to County Highway N. A \$9,911 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources will help landowners living along the Plover River conserve their natural property for future generations. The grant allows North Central Conservancy Trust to continue a Plover River lands initiative project in Portage and Marathon Counties. The goal of this project is to develop and distribute materials and educational programs that inform as well as encourages private landowners to utilize voluntary conservation options as a means of protecting priority lands near the Plover River. This would provide permanent wildlife habitat, ecological services, and recreational opportunities to the area.



So far, Sean Piette, NCCT's GIS intern, has developed land criteria essential to knowing which landowners might be on and/or near the Plover River watershed. His research thus far proved to be of great interest and quality at the University of Wisconsin's Stevens Point 2016 Student Research Symposium where he received honorable mentions for his oral presentation

and Highest Honors for his poster presentation. Sean continued to gain interest at the UW-System Research Symposium on Earth Day, which was very fitting for conservation. His success and research will provide vital data for educational outreach to potential landowners. Project Director, April Opatik, has organized interviews with seven conservation easement donors who reside within the Project area. These interviews will be featured in a high-gloss article describing the importance of their land, answering some of NCCT's most frequently asked questions, and nature photographs taken by April Opatik and Roger Zimmermann. The descriptive natures of these stories are a really important part of NCCT's story moving forward and successfully achieving the mission.



April Opatik, Project Director



I knew since I was very young that I needed to be tied with the environment and to somehow protect all of the hidden beauty that the eyes sometimes cannot see. It was two years ago around this time of the month of May in which I received a call from the former executive director of NCCT, Betsy Kerlin. She offered me the summer internship position as the Arc-GIS Conservation Specialist. It was a moment, of which the full impacts and lessons are yet to unfold, turned my future into endless paths. Having the chance to work with an inspirational leader, learning the value of the land from conservation easement land donors, and preserving land for forever made it possible for me to feel as if I was doing my part in society; it has been an enduring effect in my life.

As the summer came to a close that year, Betsy and I decided to write another grant to continue my experience as an intern throughout my senior year at UWSP. Fortunately, it was successful and I continued to learn, grow, and experience this immense passion I had for land conservation. It was a bitter-sweet moment when I graduated and acquired new work serving as the County Planner for Wood County Planning and Zoning. I knew, however, that since I was still so close to the NCCT office I couldn't end my time with them yet, so I decided to volunteer with them on the Public Relations Committee.

Moving forward, it was close to November, and it was remorsefully announced that Betsy would be leaving NCCT to live a new path with her family. It was also announced that a \$10,000 River Grant from the DNR was secured, thanks to Betsy's remarkable grant writing abilities, to produce a project protecting land near and/or on the Plover River Watershed. It was an odd feeling because my inspirational leader was leaving a place we both had passion for and yet there was more work to be done.

In December, I excitedly took on the role of Project Director for this grant and have been enjoying every minute of it. One of the project's this grant has funded is a high-gloss magazine article. I have been scheduling interviews with current land easement donors, taking photos of their land, and learning about what it means to be a true steward of the land. This experience has been fueling my childhood memories of protecting all of the hidden beauty. It is an understatement when others' have said I've done so much for NCCT, because NCCT has given me more than I can express. It has been a rewarding experience to have done what I did at NCCT and in which I feel like my footprints in the sand would stay regardless of the crashing waves.

As the project comes to an end and my path with NCCT diverges, all I can express is a simple "thank you". Thank you for everything you have giv-

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en me in terms of learning, experiencing, and living. My path with a career in conservation continues in June as I will be moving to Washington, D.C. to live with my darling boyfriend, Devin Murray. NCCT has given me the foundation in which I needed to keep pursuing my passions and saving the environment. As much as I would like to continue my support for NCCT, I have all the faith in the world that it will continue to grow and preserve more land forever. And so I say one last time a sincere “thank you” to so many names and faces I will always remember.



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